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Bd. Wa. 1872.

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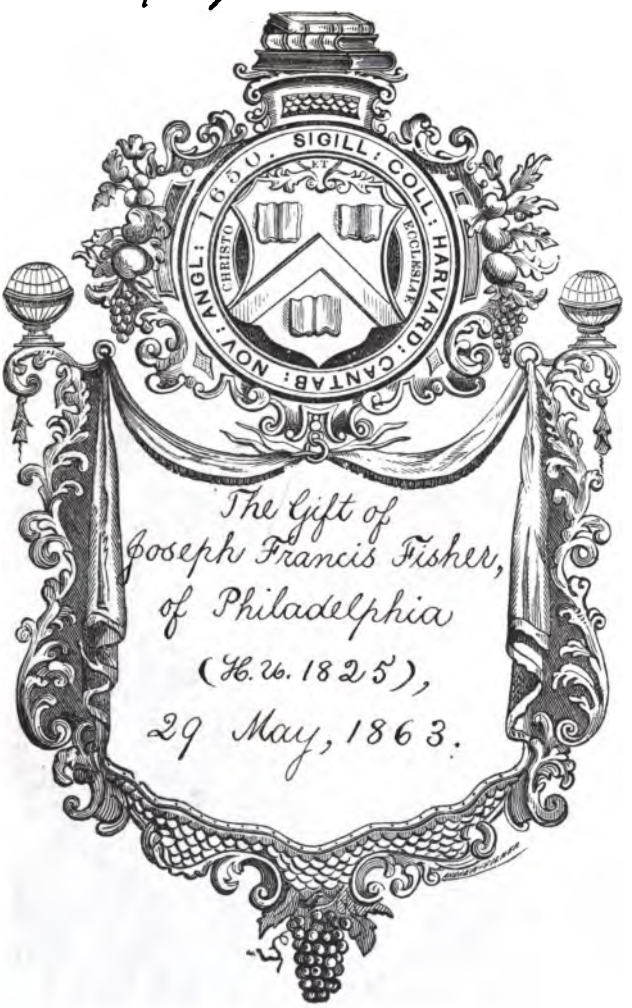

The Gift of
Joseph Francis Fisher,
of Philadelphia
(H.U. 1825),
29 May, 1863.

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MEMOIR

OF

SAMUEL BRECK,

LATE PRESIDENT OF THE

Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind.

READ BEFORE THE

BOARD OF MANAGERS, AND THE OFFICERS

OF THE INSTITUTION,

May 7, 1863.

BY J. FRANCIS FISHER,

PRESIDENT.

PHILADELPHIA:
C. SHERMAN, SON & CO., PRINTERS.
1863.

~~336.38~~

Educ 864.5,9

PROCEEDINGS OF THE BOARD OF MANAGERS.

A stated meeting of the Board of Managers of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind, was held at the Institution on Thursday, September 3d, 1862.

The chair was taken by J. Francis Fisher, the senior Vice-President.

Before the Board proceeded to the consideration of the business of the day, Dr. Casper Morris arose, and said:

"As one of the oldest members of the Association for the Instruction of the Blind, and one long favored with the personal friendship of Samuel Breck, our late revered and honored presiding officer, I must request permission to invite the Board of Managers, at this, its first meeting after his death, to pause, in order to pay a solemn tribute of respect to the memory of one who, during more than twenty-one years, was our fellow-member, and who, during twelve years, presided over our deliberations;—one for whom every member of the Board must have felt an affection resembling that of children for a parent;—and of whom it would scarcely be an exaggerated expression to speak as THE FOSTER FATHER of our helpless charge.

"Favored as has been our Institution in the honorable character of the gentlemen who, from its commencement, have

filled this responsible position, to none of our Presidents could we turn with more profound respect and veneration. No one of them exceeded Mr. Breck in kind, affectionate, sympathizing feeling for the pupils, and earnest, self-denying, laborious devotion to their interests.

"Ever solicitous for their advancement in learning, whether in letters or handicraft, he cheered their progress by the expression of his cordial approbation, and the soft touch of his gentle hand, accompanied by that, to them unknown, manifestation of his love, a smile radiant with heartfelt gratification.

"Ever thoughtful of their welfare, he devised plans for its promotion, and earnestly applied his efforts to secure the success of such plans, when sanctioned or adopted by the Board.

"Genial, kind, parental in his demeanor to the pupils and officers, the same spirit marked his action when presiding at the meetings of the Board; and unless some one of kindred spirit be raised up to fill the vacancy caused by his lamented, though not untimely, death, the Institution must languish from the want of the impulse his presence and counsels ever imparted."

On motion of the Hon. Anson V. Parsons, the Board directed the following entry to be made upon its Minutes:

"The Board of Managers of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind have heard with deep regret of the decease of their venerated President, THE HONORABLE SAMUEL BRECK, for more than twenty-one years one of their most efficient members, and for twelve years their presiding

officer. By his high sense of justice, his dignity and urbanity of demeanor, he commanded the respect and won the attachment of those whose happy fortune it was to be his associates.

"In the death of Mr. Breck, the Board of Managers have lost the most valued of their members, the Institution one of the most ardent of its supporters, and the inmates of the Asylum a sincere and sympathizing friend.

"While this Board bear in mind that Mr. Breck was often honored by the citizens of Philadelphia, in his election to stations of high public trust, which he filled with distinguished credit, yet they cannot but believe that his quiet labors in the reorganization of the Institution for the Blind, and in the establishment of its present successful system of administration, must prove the enduring record of his devoted labors in the cause of public benevolence.

"It is the wish of this Board that its senior Vice-President, Mr. Fisher, prepare a Memoir of the life of Mr. Breck, and such an acknowledgment of his labors in connection with this Institution, as may suitably be placed upon its records."

Taken from the Minutes of the Board of Managers.

ROBERT P. KANE,
Secretary.

MEMOIR.

In compliance with the request of the Board of Managers, I have prepared the following Memoir of our venerable friend and President.

It is in great measure a compilation from his own diaries, which have left me little to desire in point of materials. They were commenced in the beginning of the century, and continued with few intermissions till the year 1859. They are generally less a record of events than observations on them, and abstracts from his studies and various reading. He began, indeed, in 1830, an autobiographical memoir, carried from his earliest recollections to the year 1797. This is full of interesting anecdotes pleasantly told; and my embarrassment with it has arisen from the fear of quoting it too copiously. Hereafter it may be published with some extracts from his subsequent diaries.

I trust I may not exceed the limits which ought to restrain a memoir to be recorded on our Minutes; but I have felt I could not do justice to the subject, except by dwelling in detail on many incidents and traits of character, without which our successors would have an inadequate idea of the public services and private vir-

tues of this admirable citizen, this pure and noble-minded gentleman, who was, as none other has been, a Father to our Institution. We owe it to his memory to keep alive the affection he inspired, and to show in his bright example to our successors, his singular claims to our respect and love.

SAMUEL BRECK was born in Boston on the 17th of July, 1771. His father, of the same name, was a merchant of high standing and good fortune,—his mother, Hannah Andrews, of a family which has preserved its eminent social position to the present time.

His paternal ancestor, Edward Breck, who came from England with Governor Winthrop in 1630, and settled in Dorchester near Boston, was the progenitor of a numerous and prosperous race, among whom were always to be found, as at this day, men distinguished as well for their services as citizens, as for their private virtues, and their zealous devotion to the cause of the Christian Church.

He mentions in his memoir, that he was nursed at Lexington, the first battle-field of the Revolution; and that, according to tradition, not verified by his memory, he witnessed from some height in his nurse's arms the Battle of Bunker's Hill. Soon after this, his father carried him to Philadelphia, where he remained till the evacuation of Boston.

His first schoolmaster was a clergyman named Payson at Chelsea, but he afterwards went to the Boston

Latin School, now so pre-eminent for its classical training. He tells us that in his day "that school was kept by Mr. Hunt. He was a severe master, and flogged heartily. I went on, however, very well with him, mollifying his stern temper by occasional presents in money, which my indulgent father sent to him by me. Thus my short career at his school (seventeen or eighteen months) passed without any corporal correction. I was even sometimes selected for the honorable office of sawing and piling his wood, which to most boys is a vastly more delightful occupation than chopping logic, working themes or dividing sums; in short, a translation from intellectual labor to any bodily toil was looked upon as a special favor, and dunces as we were, we preferred it greatly to a translation of Latin into English."

His father being agent for the supplies of the French fleet and armies, became intimate with all the officers of that nation, who visited Boston, among whom his son recollected Lafayette, Lapérouse, and especially the Admiral Marquis de Vaudreuil, who persuaded Mr. Breck to send his son to a famous royal and military school at Sorèze, near Toulouse, in Languedoc, conducted by a convent of Benedictine monks. The monastery was founded in the ninth century, by King Pepin: the school was established in 1682, and at the beginning of its second century numbered 450 pupils. Here he went in December, 1782, under the care of the

Chevalier de Chalvet, a major in Rochambeau's army who was on his return home.

The voyage was remarkable in those times, for it was made in less than sixteen days from Boston to l'Orient; and the reception by the good monks of this little boy, only eleven and a half years old, was most cordial and comforting. He passed more than four years with them very happily, and acquired a good knowledge of the ancient languages and French, besides a great variety of accomplishments, which proved the grace of his life and contributed to the comfort and resources of his old age.

His memoir gives many pleasant details of his life at Sorèze. It was a very distinguished school, and he mentions among his companions the Princè de Carignan, ancestor of the King of Sardinia, several Italian and Spanish noblemen, besides Dessaix and many Frenchmen afterwards eminent in the revolutionary history of their country.

On the 8th of March, 1787, he took leave of his schoolmates, and set out on a tour with his prefect, the Rev. Dom Crozal. He writes: "On taking leave, I can truly say my heart was filled with gratitude towards those kind monks, who ever treated me with parental tenderness and the most watchful solicitude for my happiness here and hereafter. If my good grandmother, who belonged to the old colonial and intolerant sect of Presbyterians, refused to kiss me, and reluctantly gave me her blessing when I left home,

because I was going to a Popish country; what would she have said, had she known that I had turned Roman Catholic, and went to mass and confession? Yet such had been my practice for two years, without the monks having used the smallest effort to turn me from the religion of my fathers." He was converted through the influence of a schoolmate, a young man of the greatest piety and highest standing, but who was afterwards perverted to the worst form of infidelity.

I may here remark that young Breck was won back to Protestantism after his return to America. We do not know whether he took his former place in the old North Church under the celebrated Dr. Cooper, but he subsequently became a most sincere and active member of the Protestant Episcopal Church. He ever retained a respectful and affectionate recollection of his old masters, and kept a promise of aiding them in the establishment of their first church in Boston, under the Abbé Thayer, whose acquaintance he had made in France. Chiefly through his instrumentality, an old Huguenot chapel in School Street, which had been built in 1716, but no longer in use, was hired and fitted up, and he acted as quêteur at the first mass celebrated in the capital of the Puritan commonwealth. His education had eradicated all narrow sectarian prejudices, and neither then nor at any later period of his life was his religion tainted by bigotry.

The notes of his tour through France abound in proofs of intelligent curiosity and just observation, re-

markable for a boy of his age. He ended it by passing some days with the Benedictine Monks at the Royal Abbey of St. Denis, and gives an interesting account of the great Sepulchral Church of the French Kings before its desecration and plunder.

At Paris he was very kindly received by the Marquis de La Fayette, and made many distinguished acquaintances, among whom he mentions Brissot de Warville, M. de Beaumanoir, Governor of the Invalides, and St. Jean de Crèvecœur, with whom he returned to America in a French government packet, then recently established between Havre and New York. He had also among his fellow-passengers, the celebrated John Paul Jones, who was then an Admiral in the Russian Navy, and wore the decorations of several Military Orders. He describes him as a good-looking, small man, very silent and retired. The Admiral was intimate in his father's family, and gave him as a keepsake his naval spy-glass. This the elder Breck bequeathed to his son, who thought the most worthy disposition of it was to present it to a brave young officer, whose high character as a gentleman, and great professional promise, indicated him as the fittest depositary of this relic of our early triumphs on the ocean. Admiral Dupont is now the owner of the spy-glass of the Chevalier John Paul Jones.

Soon after his return young Breck was placed in the counting-house of Mr. John Codman, with whom he remained two years. During this time he formed an

intimate acquaintance with John Quincy Adams, Harrison Gray Otis, Isaac Parker, who became Chief Justice of Massachusetts, and other young men who afterwards attained eminence in the country; and had an opportunity of attending the State Convention for the consideration of the Federal Constitution, at which John Hancock presided, and the debates were conducted by Rufus King, Gorham, Ames, Parsons, Samuel Adams, and others, whose names must ever be among the chief glories of Massachusetts.

He afterwards witnessed the imposing reception of Washington on his first Presidential progress, of which his memoir contains some interesting and curious particulars, not forgetting Governor Hancock's pretended attack of gout, got up to sustain his claim to paramount State Sovereignty, which, had it not been seen through by the President, might now afford another argument for secession.*

In August, 1789, he made a journey to Philadelphia, travelling to New York in a sulky, and thence to our city in the public conveyance, when, as he tells us,

* This refers to Hancock's absurd pretension as Governor of a Sovereign State to the compliment of a first visit from the President on his entrance into Massachusetts. He laid a trap for this concession by pretending a fit of the gout, and invited a large company of the local dignitaries and officers of the French fleet then in Boston harbor to meet General Washington at a state dinner. The President did not honor the banquet, to the Governor's great mortification. This story is to be found in various memoirs of the time.

he had the whole of the coach to himself as far as Princeton.

While at New York, he resided in the family of General Knox, an intimate friend of his father's, then Secretary of War in the newly organized administration under the present Constitution; and by him was presented to President Washington, of whom his subsequent journal gives many particulars; as he had the honor of being often his guest, when Philadelphia was the seat of the Federal Government.

In August, 1790, he made another voyage to Europe in one of his father's vessels; when he was nearly lost in the Irish Channel, in a storm most graphically described by him. He made a short tour through England, and a considerable sojourn in London, where we had then no National representative; but he carried introductions to Sir George Staunton, Sir William Pepperell and the American painter Copley father of Lord Chancellor Lyndhurst, and other gentlemen, who received him with great kindness. He saw George III in his state procession to open Parliament, and afterwards listened to the eloquence of Pitt, Fox, Burke, and Sheridan, in the House of Commons.

Crossing the Channel, after a brief visit to Holland, he arrived in France at the most momentous period of the French Revolution, but before it had developed its greatest horrors. He was most cordially received by Messieurs de Noailles, de Lafayette and de Vaudreuil, who were members of the Constituent Assembly, then

holding its sessions in the Riding School near the Tuilleries, where he heard Mirabeau and other great revolutionary orators.

He describes the devastation which he witnessed at the palaces of Versailles and Chantilly, and was introduced to the chapel of the Tuilleries, where he saw the King, Queen and Dauphin, then prisoners of the mob in their own palace; and was graciously noticed by them, after kneeling with them before their humbled altar; where, we cannot doubt, he offered a heartfelt prayer for those innocent victims of their predecessors' crimes.

"My valet-de-place, Lapierre," writes Mr. Breck, "lived near the Tuilleries, and knew many of the soldiers who mounted guard at the gates of that palace. On Sunday, he told me that if I wished to see the Royal Family at their devotions, he could get me a seat in the private chapel of the château. I gladly took advantage of his offer. Not many minutes after I had been seated, the Court entered the galleries. The Queen, the Dauphin, his sister the present Duchess d'Angoulême, and Monsieur afterwards Louis XVIII, stood in the gallery opposite the altar. The courtiers filled the small side galleries. There happened to be nobody in the chapel down stairs, except the officiating priest and his attendants, an old woman, and myself. Mass lasted perhaps twenty minutes; at the conclusion of which the humbled Marie Antoinette took the little Dauphin in her arms and showed him to me and the old woman, who represented

on that occasion, the sovereign people. That proud and beautiful woman had been so sharply visited with grief, that at thirty-six years of age her hair was gray. The Dauphin, as well as his royal parents and relations, was dressed in plain clothes, with a white handkerchief tied *à la Creole* on his head. The King had a velvet suit and looked very like the impression on his coins. His body was in constant motion, rolling from side to side while he read his prayers. His brother, Monsieur, resembled him very much, and his daughter, the Duchess d'Angoulême, now so ugly, was then a lovely-looking girl of about fourteen."

He had sad meetings with some of his old friends the Benedictines, driven from their seat of learning and happiness; several of them destined to perish in the dreadful massacre of September; others, infected with the madness and infidelity of the hour, to go through scenes of crime to a less noble end.

In taking leave of his old companions and professors, it will not be uninteresting to mention that, in his diary under date of October, 1856, I found the following advertisement, cut from a recent French paper:

"Le banquet annuel des anciens elèves de l'Ecole de Sorèze (directions Despaulx, Ferlus, et Bernard), aura lieu le Jeudi, 8 Mai, à six heures, chez Lemardeley, Rue Richelieu, No. 100. On s'inscrit chez Lemardeley, et au Comité Sorèzien, Place de la Bourse."

As he was under the Direction Despaulx, it was an equal surprise and pleasure to Mr. Breck, to find that the surviving contemporaries of his college days, after

an interval of seventy years, and all the convulsions and wars of the Revolution and Empire, still cherished pleasing recollections of their Alma Mater, and still preserved their chain of youthful friendship.

The fact is that the College, ruined by the Revolutionary whirlwind, was revived under the care of one of its ancient professors Ferlus, in the time of the Empire, and still maintained its standing as a place of high moral and classical education. At a later date, the celebrated Père Lacordaire was called on to preside over it, and retiring from the scenes of his brilliant oratorical success, devoted his last years to the instruction of youth, for which his eloquence, piety, and pure and noble nature so eminently qualified him.

There were in 1791, but few inducements for a prolonged residence in Paris; and Mr. Breck hurried away from these sadly exciting scenes, and making a brief sojourn in England, returned to Boston after about a year's absence, by a voyage lasting seventy-five days.

He established himself for a short time in business in his native city; but when his father removed with all his family to Philadelphia, in August, 1792, he determined to accompany him. Although he never lost his interest in the home of his ancestors, and kept up by visits and hospitalities a most cordial intercourse with his kinsfolk and friends; his affections were entirely transferred to the home of his adoption, and for the seventy years of his residence, Philadelphia had no

more devoted nor useful citizen,—more zealous in her service, more jealous of her honor.

Our city was then the seat of the National Government; and not only had he an opportunity of personal intercourse with all that our country then possessed of genius or greatness, but his perfect knowledge of the French language brought him into intimate acquaintance with a large number of French exiles. I may mention Messrs. De Noailles, La Rochefoucault-Liancourt, Talleyrand, Louis Philippe,* Volney, and afterwards Moreau and others, of whom his retentive memory preserved many interesting anecdotes. His memoir gives a well-drawn picture of the brilliant society which all these contributed to form.

He resided six years in the city, engaged in mercantile pursuits, interrupted for a short season in 1794 by the insurrection in Western Pennsylvania; when he went as corporal in one of the companies of McPherson's Blues, on that bloodless expedition. He has left only one survivor of that honorable corps.

On Christmas Eve of the year 1795 he married Miss Jean Ross, daughter of an eminent merchant of our city, with whom he lived for nearly sixty-three years; years passed generally in great tranquillity, though

* In the years 1830 and 1832, the writer had the honor of several interviews with the King of the French, who made very particular and kind inquiries about the family of Mr. Breck, seeming to recollect with pleasure his sojourn in Philadelphia.

saddened by the loss of an only daughter, just as she had reached womanhood, with every attraction and accomplishment which parental affection could desire.

Soon after his marriage, he retired into the country, to a beautiful villa, which he had built on the banks of the Schuylkill; where he resided more than thirty years, devoted to agriculture and gardening; but at intervals cultivating the sciences and the arts of music and painting, for which a taste early inspired seems never to have worn out.

In his neighborhood, he was constanly engaged in every good and charitable work; in all matters of public service and improvement giving his time, his money, and his influence. Thus he took an active part in the erection of the two bridges over the Schuylkill, and in the establishment of the church at Mantua. He was a constant attendant at the meetings of the Agricultural Society, co-operating with his neighbor and friend, the learned and witty Judge Peters, of whom he wrote an interesting biographical notice, delivered before the Agricultural Society in 1828, which is in print. He was an ardent politician of the old Federal school, but always ready to do justice to his opponents, and ever discountenancing what he regarded as factious opposition. He was the author of many articles in the newspapers, and constantly attended the local political meetings before they became utterly perverted.

In 1817 he was elected to the State Senate of Pennsylvania, where he remained four years, during which

time he devoted himself to the foundation of our system of internal improvements, preparing with great care a voluminous report, with maps. In this work he had the important co-operation of Dr. William Lehman, a member of the House, to whose exertions at that time, and subsequently, our Commonwealth in great measure owed the successful completion of her canals. These merits were fully admitted in a memoir of Dr. Lehman, read before the directors of the Athenæum in 1847 by Mr. Breck.

In February, 1821, he introduced, by a speech which is preserved in print, a bill for the final emancipation of the slaves remaining in Pennsylvania, supposed at that time to number about three hundred, which does not appear to have been passed. It was, perhaps, doubted whether the few aged negroes, still supported in the families in which they were born, would be happier for the severance of the tie, or better cared for in the county poor-houses. Not the less honorable and benevolent were the motives inspiring this attempt to hasten the day, however near, when the honor of our State would be relieved from the reproaches of the awakening philanthropy of Christendom.

In 1822, he was elected to represent his district in the National Legislature. Speaking of his brief Congressional career, he writes, "I am happy to say it was free from tumult and strife. The Eighteenth Congress was either composed of less combustible materials, or the demon of discord was not there to kindle them into a

flame. It was, indeed, a happy time, marked by general good fellowship among some of the most eminent men that our nation ever possessed." In these halcyon days our country was visited by its chivalrous friend and defender, Lafayette, and Mr. Breck had the happiness of joining in the act of justice and gratitude by which his great services were repaid, and afterwards extending his private hospitalities at his house on the Schuylkill to his father's friend and his own.

The failure of a choice by the electoral colleges committed to Congress the election of a successor to Mr. Monroe, when Mr. Breck, alone among the representatives from Pennsylvania, gave his vote for Mr. Adams, testifying at the same time his great respect for that eminent statesman, and his unbroken attachment to the friend of his youth. Mr. Adams had looked for this, and testified his satisfaction.

Mr. Breck's journal during his Congressional career seems to have been intermitted, and although there are frequent references to the distinguished men whose acquaintance he had made at Washington, I do not find any passage worthy of quotation except a conversation with Mr. Crawford, who informed him that the clause in President Monroe's Message with respect to the interference of European powers in the affairs of the American States to the south of us, known as the Monroe Doctrine, was never submitted to the Cabinet, but prepared with the advice of Mr. Adams alone. This takes something away from its supposed weight and

significance, for we may well suppose that, had Mr. Monroe attached to it all the importance since attributed, he would not have enunciated it without the serious deliberation of his whole body of chosen counsellors.

After his term in Congress, he again served in the State Senate for two years, and then resigned in consequence of impaired health. During this latter term of office he introduced resolutions to form a joint School Committee, and being appointed chairman drew up a report and submitted a bill, which latter is the parent law of the Public Schools in the State. Several of his speeches are preserved in print, especially one delivered in January, 1832, relative to the Union of the States and the Constitution of the United States, one in January, 1832, on the Tariff, one in February, 1833, on the Bill for Internal Improvements, and one in 1834 on Mr. Penrose's Resolutions against the Bank of the United States.

Here his services as a legislator end. He was afterwards several times solicited to accept a candidature for the State or National Legislature; but declined, although he always reverted with satisfaction to his associations and occupations at Washington and Harrisburg.

Having removed to the city after the death of his daughter, he entered upon a new field of usefulness. He was elected in 1840 to the City Councils, where his services as head of the Finance Committee were very important, and honorably acknowledged by a vote of

thanks on his retiring from that body in October, 1842. He was very urgent and successful in his efforts to improve the fortifications of the Delaware, and in all other matters evinced his earnest and disinterested zeal for the public good. Some years previous to this he was elected a Trustee of the University of Pennsylvania, and his journal gives evidence of his active interest in its management.

He was a director in several of our Canal Companies; and being appointed by the Governor of Pennsylvania, in 1837, on a commission to visit and report on the works of the upper division of the Lehigh, he performed the duties assigned to him in the following summer.

He was one of the founders of the Philadelphia Savings Fund Society, and having been consulted as to its organization by his friend Mr. Condé Raguet, to whom he gives the credit of the first suggestion of this most valuable institution, was one of the original Board of Managers. He resigned in March, 1819, after assisting in carrying it through the first monetary panic, which, like many subsequent ones, only confirmed the wisdom and integrity of its management and the security of its depositors.

As a director of one of our banks, which afterwards was involved in difficulties from too great confidence in its cashier, he early perceived and protested against the dangers of its course, and resigned. And here, as

in every other case, evinced his independence and his high sense of public and private honor.

On the downfall of the United States Bank he was selected by the stockholders to preside at their meetings and committees of investigation, but declined taking a part in its subsequent management.

He constantly presided at public meetings for objects which called forth the interest of our fellow-citizens in National affairs, and generally addressed them in speeches remarkable for brevity, sense, and good taste. Amongst other such occasions may be mentioned the great dinner given to Daniel Webster by the merchants and citizens of Philadelphia in 1846.

The last occasion of the sort was on the 28th day of February, 1851, when he was in his 80th year. He then took the chair at a very large meeting of the Whig citizens, held in the upper saloon of the Chinese Museum, to express their approbation of the compromise measures passed at the last session of Congress, and to urge upon the Legislature of Pennsylvania the repeal of the obnoxious features of the Act of Assembly, passed March 3, 1847, relative to fugitive slaves. His feeble voice was animated by the patriotism which breathed in all he uttered; but, alas! like the warnings of those great statesmen, his juniors by many years, with whom he had been associated in Congress, but who preceded him to the tomb, it was lifted up in vain.

As the most distinguished among the descendants of

the Pilgrims resident in the city of Penn, he was elected President of the local Society of the Sons of New England; and at its first annual celebration in December, 1844, delivered a very interesting discourse. He presided at several succeeding anniversaries, and added much to the pleasure of the meetings by the part he took in them.

As a member of the Historical Society, he was actively engaged in the successful effort, made in 1840, to renew the Society, then threatened with extinction. He took an active part in their proceedings, and read at one of the meetings a memoir of Whitfield and his times. I must refer to the interesting memoir of Mr. Breck, recently read before the Historical Society by its distinguished President, the Hon. Joseph R. Ingersoll, for other particulars on this head, and I would acknowledge my indebtedness to that memoir for various facts, only repeated here that they may not seem to have been overlooked in a sketch intended to be as brief as consistent with completeness.

He was elected in April, 1838, a member of the American Philosophical Society, and his general taste for scientific research gave him an interest in all its transactions. He read several papers at its meetings, especially one on the Paper Currency of the Revolution, which was presented at the Centennial Celebration of that Society in 1843, and afterwards printed.

Though not one of the founders of the Philadelphia

Athenæum, he was one of its largest benefactors. He presented to the library of that Institution in 1829 a valuable collection of books to the number of nine hundred, afterwards increased at his death by the bequest of the largest part of his private library, thereby increasing the gift to upwards of two thousand volumes. He was elected President of the Athenæum in 1845, and was most punctual in his attendance at the meetings of the Board till his failing health induced him to tender his resignation in 1855. This the Directors induced him to withdraw, wishing to retain the honor of his name at the head of their Board. About the same time, the Directors, at their own expense, had placed in one of their halls a fine medallion bust in bronze of their President in a richly carved frame of oak,—a silent compliment, which was most sensibly felt and courteously acknowledged. Besides the memoir of Dr. Lehman read to the Board, before referred to, Mr. Breck also delivered an address on laying the corner-stone of the new Hall, on the 1st of November, 1845, which is in print.

Various other literary institutions were the objects of his interest and liberality. In March, 1843, he made a present to the Mercantile Library of ninety-two volumes. To the library of the American Philosophical Society he gave forty bound volumes of valuable pamphlets; and to the Philadelphia Library he presented a large collection of autograph letters from distinguished Revolutionary characters and for-

eigners, which he had selected from the papers of his own father, Mr. Ross, his father-in-law, and his own correspondence.

He was a sincere and ardent member of the Protestant Episcopal Church. He was one of the founders of St. Luke's Church, a vestryman and a devoted friend of its various pastors. He represented this church and the little chapel at Mantua in several Conventions; and was always ready to give to the various societies and charities connected with the Church, both time and money, of which, with a very limited income, he seemed always to have enough for every good object.

In his private life, we may find an equally good example. Kind, cheerful, friendly, hospitable, he was always surrounded by friends and his numerous relations, to whom he endeared himself by every affectionate attention; never forgetting those little tokens of kind remembrance which are more acceptable than expensive gifts. At his death, many of his friends were astonished at the moderate estate to be divided between his kinsfolk and various charitable objects; but it was found that he had turned almost all his estate into annuities, that he might distribute it during his life, and share the happiness of others in his own beneficence.

Full of sympathy for all, he seemed to be the intimate friend of all good men; and when honors were to be paid to the living or the dead, he was generally

selected as the representative of his fellow-citizens in their demonstrations of respect or grief.

Interested in all public matters, warm in his political opinions, but always insisting on an honorable course, and always liberal and just to his opponents, he may be said never to have made an enemy, and never to have lost a friend.

With a taste for music and the fine arts not too fastidious to find pleasure in moderate merit, he practised music and painting, even in old age, to his own satisfaction, and was a kindly critic at every exhibition. He was a constant reader, and secured his acquisition by notes which form a large part of his diaries. He had made some progress in the Natural Sciences, especially Mineralogy, in which department he amassed a considerable collection of specimens, afterwards presented to Burlington College. He had a great facility in versifying, which was turned to account in many a pretty compliment to his female friends; and we have still preserved several neat translations by him from the best French poets. At one time he was a frequent contributor to our journals and magazines, especially the "Portfolio," when edited by the accomplished Denny.

Thus, in his protracted and childless old age, he was not desolate; for he found in his elegant tastes as well as his benevolent pursuits the most cheering occupation. From gloomy misanthropy, indeed, his religion would have secured him, for he was a most

sincere and humble Christian, of which we have evidence in his diaries, where every opening year and every anniversary of his birth and marriage was an occasion to record his grateful thanks for the mercies of Heaven; and on every recurrence of the Lord's day, we find that the services of the Church were only a small part of his devotional occupations, and the words of Scripture and the teachings of the preacher were never dismissed without solemn meditation and often extended comment.

Although Mr. Breck was not connected with the management of the Institution for the Instruction of the Blind till June, 1841, it was not at that date that his interest and services began. He was a member of the State Senate in January, 1834, when our first principal, Mr. Friedlander, assisted by a committee of the managers, Messrs. Coleman, Richards, and Fraley, presented before the Legislature at Harrisburg the result of the system of education in our eleven earliest pupils. The benevolent heart of Mr. Breck was at once deeply interested in the cause. He describes the effect of the exhibition on an audience of near fifteen hundred persons; and adds "that when one of the boys, about twelve years old, recited some verses and came to the following passage, there was scarcely a dry eye among us:

> "I never saw my father's face:
> Yet on his forehead when I place
> My hand, and feel the wrinkles there,
> Left less by time than anxious care,

I fear the world has sights of woe,
To knit the brow of manhood so.
I sit upon my father's knee:
He'd love me less if I could see."

"I never saw my mother's smile;
Her gentle tones my heart beguile,
They fall like distant melody,
They are so mild and sweet to me.
She murmurs not—my mother dear!
Tho' sometimes I have kissed the tear
From her soft cheek, to tell the joy
One smiling word would give her boy."

He not only became at once by subscription a life member, but warmly advocated the bill for the charter and endowment by the State; thus placing himself really among the founders of an Institution, which afterwards so largely engaged his affections and occupied so much of his time and thoughts.

His continued interest in the Institution was shown at the time of the Fancy Fair at the old Masonic Hall, undertaken by the ladies of Philadelphia in April, 1837, to which he contributed by liberal donations and purchases.

He was elected a director on the 3d of June, 1841, and soon afterwards was placed in the chair of the Committee of Finance, in which the Institution had at once a proof of the value of his services. He was also during the same year appointed one of a committee for the reorganization of the Institution, now be-

ginning the second period of its successful existence; having tested its capacity for instruction, secured public confidence, obtained the support of the State, and received the noble endowment by the will of Mr. Birch. In these arrangements, especially those of the financial department, the intelligent business mind and careful forethought of Mr. Breck did much to secure the admirable working of the system. We owe, it is believed, to him the plan devised for disbursing the funds of the Institution, and the mode of accounting by the Treasurer and other officers; and in carrying out the plan he never relaxed his watchfulness or yielded a point of exactness.

At the annual meeting of the contributors in March, 1843, he was elected one of the Vice-Presidents; and on the 4th of March, 1850, he was called upon to fill the place of President, vacated by the resignation of Mr. Richards, which he occupied till the time of his death.

And never did a board possess a presiding officer or an institution of instruction a head better fitted by character, temper, and manners to perform all his duties. And to himself it was a constant source of happiness and pride, calling forth all the kindest sentiments of his nature, gratifying his heart by its results, occupying without fatiguing his mind. Denied the happiness of paternal affections, these helpless yet cheerful children elicited all the tenderness of his nature. He was delighted to call them his blind chil-

dren, and he remarked to the Principal that he enjoyed more happiness since he was seventy years old than at any part of his previous life.

I quote from a note of Mr. Chapin's to myself. "Mr. Breck's personal interest in the happiness of the pupils was remarkable. No one ever made a request that he did not attend to, or bring a grievance that he did not remove if possible. He gave time and attention promptly to such cases. His love for the pupils thus constantly manifested attached them to him as a father."

Almost every visit to the school was marked by some act of kindness,—a present to one, a reward to another. To stimulate them to write, he offered every girl who would compose a letter to him a little reward, such as a pair of gloves; and finding the good effects, tried the same experiment with the boys. These letters he would always answer himself, sometimes in words of kind advice and exhortation, sometimes in a playful tone. He encouraged a turn for versification, and gave them examples from his pen, which are treasured in their albums. Birthdays and the pleasant festival of St. Valentine were not neglected, nor was even the innocent indulgence of personal vanity discouraged. He himself highly appreciated neatness and elegance of attire, and under proper limits, he encouraged the female pupils in a natural taste, which their infirmity had not extinguished. Can we wonder that he was beloved by all?

In one of his addresses to the pupils he writes:

"Every act of good-will and kindness on my part seems gratefully responded to, and reciprocated with warmth;" and in another place, "The blind are, according to my observation, more cordial in their sympathies and love than their seeing sisters; I speak of the female portion, whom I have had a pretty good opportunity of knowing in my long acquaintance with them. They appear to treat each other with a gentleness and kindness that may be suited to dispel, by reciprocal tenderness and balmy words and acts of comfort, every assault upon their healthy and happy minds. I will not ask whether I am right in this my fond and affectionate judgment of their dispositions;" and again, speaking of the compensation for their bereavement in the increased acuteness of the other senses, he writes: "And not only the tone of the voice, but the gentle sound of the foot, when scarcely touching the floor on entering a room occupied by blind acquaintances, is quickly discovered, and several voices cry, 'That is Mr. ——;' and when they like the newly-arrived person, what a cordial welcome they give him! Often and often have I tried that experiment with the dear female pupils of our school, and never without being instantly recognized, and having my heart filled with thanks for their kind and friendly salutations."

If it did not extend the memoir too much, I might multiply extracts from his addresses to the pupils, and from his journals, proving his constant, undeviating, and tender affection to these objects of his interest.

Our Principal, Mr. Chapin, has placed in my hands a volume of MS. addresses, handsomely bound, which was presented to him by our venerable friend. It contains the sketch of an address to the pupils, delivered at a meeting of the Lyceum, January 28, 1847, on the settlement and Christianizing of America. 2d. A lecture delivered before the pupils on the 24th of April, 1847, on the "Wonders in Created Things, both in reference to the Works of God in the Material World, and the Works of Man, suggested and developed by mental faculties bestowed upon him by his Heavenly Father." 3d. "Some account of distinguished individuals in a state of blindness, and the capacity of the blind in general to acquire a competent knowledge for self-support," delivered at the Institution, February 24, 1851. 4th. An address on the occasion of the third anniversary of the establishment of the Home Department, read to the pupils and household on the evening of the 13th of March, 1854; and finally, an address delivered in April, 1854, before the Lyceum named in compliment to himself, a compliment fully appreciated, and more fully deserved. Speaking of the objects of the Lyceum, he says: "It shall be my study to promote them by furnishing the members with sufficient books to make a respectable beginning, together with a book case for their safe keeping, and to attend their meetings, occasionally hearken to their debates, and otherwise watch their progress. These little attentions I will, under Providence, endeavor to bestow upon the

Society, invoking upon it a blessing from that Providence, without which neither the Breck Lyceum, or any other institution, can look for or expect success. If your labor be unmindful of the favor of Heaven, it will be labor in vain, or it will be labor leading to error." These addresses are all prepared with great care, show extensive reading, and are enlivened by stories and descriptions drawn from the events of his own life. Some of them might well be printed, not only for the permanent entertainment of the pupils, but for moral and religious instruction.

The extracts already made are all that can at present be taken from them.

Besides these occasions, he usually addressed the pupils at the close of the examinations; which he attended whenever health permitted, mingling commendation with wholesome advice.

At the weekly exhibitions his presence was so constant, that he was always supposed unwell, when his customary chair was unoccupied. He made it a point to be present when any eminent strangers visited the Institution; when his dignity, courtesy, and benevolence were sure of adding to the interest excited. His journals mention these receptions, and the page on which he records the visit of the Countess de Rossi, the amiable and accomplished Madame Sonntag, on October 19, 1852, is peculiarly interesting. The sympathy she evinced, and the praises she bestowed upon the music, gratified his pride in the attainments of our pupils,

which the partiality of his parental affections placed in a high rank.

The numbers who attended the weekly exhibitions will long remember his venerable and dignified form, and the delight he always evinced in the musical performances; and an incident which occurred about two years ago will leave a lasting impression on the large audience, said to be about seven hundred, who witnessed it. I quote the account from Mr. Ingersoll's Memoir. "Soon after the attack on Fort Sumter, he was at a concert of the pupils of the Institution, and occupied a seat on the platform. He here availed himself of an opportunity, as he had done on former occasions, to manifest his deep interest in the events that have been crowded into the months elapsed since the opening of the Southern rebellion. At the close of the concert, a call was made for the 'Star-Spangled Banner,' and it was sung with great spirit. At the last chorus Mr. Breck sprang up in view of the audience, and waving his hat over his head, called for three cheers for 'the Union and the Constitution, *one and indivisible!*'" adding, "I was a man when they were formed, and God forbid that I should live to witness their downfall!"

Such were his relations to the children.

Every member of the Board will bear me witness of the dignity, patience and courtesy which marked his conduct as our presiding officer; of his punctuality in attendance at our meetings; of his interest in our pro-

ceedings; of his exactness in all matters of business committed to him, or which his position as our President seemed to place under his special care.

I need not remind the officers of the Institution, from the Principal down to the occupant of the humblest position in our household, of his considerate kindness, of his frequent tokens of friendly remembrance, of his kind advice, of his forbearance, of his readiness to lighten their burdens, and his liberality in all questions of remuneration.

In speaking of our Wednesday exhibitions, it must not be forgotten that we owe to Mr. Breck the foundation of the Exhibition Fund, growing out of the necessity of limiting the admissions to the purchasers of tickets. For this he offered a resolution at a meeting of the Board of Managers, October 3d, 1850, which was adopted, and has been attended with a greater benefit than any vote of money would have been. Though its appropriation depends upon the Committee of Instruction, it is felt by our worthy graduates, to be a fund of their own; and may well be, as I have no doubt it is, an incentive to perfection in the accomplishments so attractive to the public.

The Department of the Home, though it had its first suggestion at the very commencement of our Institution, and was recommended in various subsequent reports of our Principals, and in several annual reports by the Board, may be said to have been carried into execution chiefly under his auspices and by his exertions. Mr.

Chapin gives the following particulars of the special agency of Mr. Breck: "In the year 1850, one of the female pupils, whose term had just expired, was regularly discharged. Mr. Breck, some days after, meeting her in the street, and unaware of the fact of her discharge, expressed his surprise and regret that a worthy young girl, who had not a comfortable home, should be deprived of the continued benefits of the Institution. On representing the fact to the Principal, he replied that the number of resident pupils (so called in the Institution), whose terms had expired, was considerable; and if increased, some organization into an industrious Home Department, so long contemplated by the Managers, would be necessary. Mr. Breck requested the Principal to communicate such a plan; and at the next stated meeting of the Board, November 7th, 1850, Mr. Breck, as President, read the letter, and the whole subject was, at his request, referred to a committee composed of the President and the chairmen of the Standing Committees. This committee reported a plan of organization, written by the President and printed by the Board; and the Home was at once established, and ever received during his life his continued fostering care." In another place Mr. Chapin says, "The Home claimed his most special regard. He identified himself with its welfare and success. If he missed any of its members in his frequent visits to the Institution, he always made particular inquiries after them. He watched over that branch of the work department with solicitude, that

any lack of sales might not reduce the earnings of its inmates, and he often purchased articles made by them, for their encouragement."

In the success of this good work he had a rich return; which, like all his other benevolent acts, brought blessings on his old age. Not the least part of his reward was the gratitude of these objects of his protection and kindness; and his journal records with high gratification, the testimonial of the inmates of the Home, offered to him on April 6th, 1858, in a neatly executed view of the children at their work, on card-board, inscribed, "THE HON. SAMUEL BRECK, THE FATHER OF THE HOME, Instituted March 12th, 1851," with the following acrostic, written by Miss Mary Donnelly, one of the pupils:

"**H**ealth, happiness and peace be thine, dear friend!
On thee may blessings from on high descend!
May we, the objects of thy love and care,
Express our hope, thy home in heaven to share!"

I may not omit noticing the tribute of respect paid to our venerable President, at a meeting of the contributors, in February, 1855, directing a tablet with a medallion likeness to be erected in our exhibition room; an unusual, but richly deserved testimonial, by which it was intended to convey to our President, and present before the public, our high sense of the services he had rendered; our high estimation of his many virtues. The motives which actuated the contributors, we are happy to believe, were fully appreciated by him, and

while modestly disclaiming his right to the testimonial, he was sensibly gratified by it.

From the time of his taking the place of President of our Institution, Mr. Breck invariably prepared the introduction to the Annual Report of the Managers; in which he always introduced some topic of peculiar interest, pointing out the evidences of our pre-eminent success, calling the attention of the contributors and the public to those objects in which co-operation was most needed, especially in the establishment of the Home, and seizing the occasion to give the just meed of praise to the officers of peculiar merit, and to pay a just tribute of respect and grief to those of our associates taken from us by death.

He prepared special obituary notices on the occasion of the loss at sea of Jacob G. Morris, and on the death of Dr. Robert M. Patterson, to both of whom our Institution owed a debt of gratitude for eminent and devoted services; concluding his notice of the latter by the affecting passage of his nomination by him as successor to Mr. Richards. These notices were printed by direction of the Board, as well as an address to the pupils at the time of the distribution of the New Testament and Book of Psalms, under the will of Miss Sarah Stillé. This address was delivered on December 14th, 1857. Expatiating on the exquisite poetry and piety of the Psalmist and calling on them to use it as a manual of the highest devotion, he exhorts them to seek in the Psalms and the Sacred Scriptures of the

New Testament the holy spirit of religion, the love of God, and the love of their neighbor, in which would be found their present happiness and their future welfare. This was probably his last address of any length. He was then in his 87th year.

He had been for several of the last years of his life subject to an affection of the heart, always aggravated by excitement, and he could rarely exert himself to speak. Moreover, his hearing was slightly impaired, and although always attending the meetings of the Board of Managers, and taking a part in their proceedings; it had been his habit, since September, 1860, to call on Mr. Waterman or some other of the Vice-Presidents to conduct the business of the meetings in his place. Our records show that he was with us on the 3d of July, 1862, the last meeting preceding the summer vacation, during which he died.

His last visit to the inmates of the Institution was on the 28th of June, 1862, on occasion of the distribution of prizes to successful pupils. At the close of the public examination, when asked to deliver the prizes, he declined, placing his hand upon his heart in allusion to the spasmodic attacks to which he was liable. He delegated Mr. Peale to take his place, and retiring from his usual seat on the stage, took a seat among the audience and soon after retired.

His health for the last year, had been considerably shaken by several attacks of intermittent fever; but he was rarely confined long to the house by illness, and

still took his wonted interest in the Institution, his friends, and the events of the day. On the morning of the 22d of August he was prostrated by an attack of paralysis; which, happily, did not deprive him of his intelligence, but was the forerunner of others, under the effect of which he died on the last day of the month. He exhibited throughout his illness his accustomed kindness to all around him; received the last consolations of religion in a spirit worthy of his life, and gave up his gentle spirit to his Maker without a struggle.

Although he has left a place in society and in our Institution which cannot be filled, we dare not repine that he is taken from us in the extremity of human age,* with every duty fulfilled, and a character without reproach. Out of the moderate estate left by him, he made a handsome bequest to the Home, but his memory and his example are our richest legacy.

It seems hardly necessary to say more. The incidents recorded in the preceding pages need no summary to place his character before us.

Mr. Breck was not a person of extraordinary talents, of profound acquirements, of restless energy or lofty ambition; but he has shown that these are not needed to fulfil the duties of a citizen in their highest acceptation. He was born and bred at a happy period for the development of the noblest traits of character. He

* 91 years and 46 days.

had around him, in intimate association, the highest examples of virtue and patriotism. He had received that superior education which prepared him for better occupations than those which lead to wealth, and inspired those fine qualities and elegant tastes which may, perhaps, be most successfully cultivated by the possessor of modest means. He had a heart which taught him that to diffuse happiness around him, was the surest way to enjoy it himself, and that this could best be done by a multitude of kind offices to his friends and dependents. He placed the good of others as his constant aim; and there were few who more entirely succeeded in gaining the love and respect of all his fellow-citizens.

Mr. Breck is often cited as a gentleman of the old school; but he had none of the pedantic pomposity, the usual type of that class, so often mistaken for dignity. He was not given to flourishing salutations or studied compliments. Neither was his courteousness like that said to be inspired by kissing a celebrated stone in the Emerald Isle; nor yet akin to the cajolery of Autolycus, or of the Yankee clock-maker, who has given an American name to interested flattery. He had been educated in France, but was not an adept in the commerce of compliment, the glistening froth which feeds social vanity for a moment, but is as unsubstantial as the breath on which it floats. His was the real courtesy of a benevolent heart, distinguished by urbanity

in conversation, but most remarkable for prompting a multitude of little acts for which the presence of the object was unnecessary. Not to speak of the kind attention called forth in sickness or distress, he seemed to know by instinct when a token of remembrance would be most gratifying. Had he listened to or read a literary production, he hastened to write and tell the author how much pleasure it had given him. Was a friend about to leave the country, he carried with him a letter expressive of kind wishes, and received his congratulations on his return. If a visit which he thought due was prevented, a note with compliments and excuses was sure to represent him; and I presume there is hardly one among his acquaintances who has not in his portfolio some such memento. Among his survivors there are still those who miss the customary token of remembrance on occasion of a birthday which he never forgot, or dear old merry Christmas, when a flower, a little drawing, or some verses from his hand, would give the most gratifying proof of friendship.

—And thus it was to the end.

Mr. Breck had seen the beginning of our great Republic, studied our institutions at their formation, associated with those who framed and those who set the machine in motion, as well as with the noblest expounders and defenders of the Constitution in later days. He loved his country devotedly, and was proud of it. He had taken part in the administration of its

affairs before corruption and party had ruined public virtue and sapped the basis of our liberties. To the evidence of this degradation he resolutely shut his eyes, and refused to believe that our great Republic would not survive the storms which had begun to rage around him. The downfall of the Government would have broken his heart. May we not say then in the words of the great historian of Imperial Rome, "Felix erat non vitæ tantum claritate sed etiam opportunitate mortis?" praying that the parallel may not be carried further, and that the fearful picture given by Tacitus of the events which followed the death of Agricola, may have no counterpart with us.